

# **Programme Specification: Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture ('Conversion Year')**

**Date of Publication to Students: September 2010**

**NOTE:** This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detail on the specific learning outcomes, indicative content and the teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found (1) at <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/biad>, (2) in the Module Specifications and (3) in the Student Handbook.

The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed by the University and may be checked within independent review processes undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency.

<b>Awarding Institution / Body:</b>	<b>Birmingham City University</b>
<b>Teaching Institution:</b>	<b>Birmingham Institute of Art and Design</b>
<b>Interim Awards and Final Award:</b>	<b>Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture</b>
<b>Programme Title:</b>	<b>MA Landscape Architecture (Conversion Route)</b>
<b>Main fields of Study:</b>	<b>Professionally accredited Landscape Architecture</b>
<b>Modes of Study:</b>	<b>Full-Time and Part-Time</b>
<b>Language of Study:</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>UCAS Code:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>JACS Code:</b>	

**Professional Status of the programme (if applicable):**

The Graduate Diploma award is the first year of a professionally-accredited Programme leading to professional Landscape Architecture. It functions as a 'Conversion Year' for students with a first degree in an appropriate subject who wish to enter the profession and such a 'Conversion Year' is a requirement of the chartered professional body for Landscape Architecture in the UK – the Landscape Institute (L.I.) for such students.

Following the 'Conversion Year' students proceed to the MA in Landscape Architecture. The award of Postgraduate Diploma (within the MA in Landscape Architecture) is fully accredited by the Landscape Institute.

Consequently, successful completion of the Postgraduate Diploma only (but not the Graduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate) enables students to apply for 'Licentiate' membership of the Landscape Institute.

This leads to the 'Pathways to Chartership' process and full chartered membership of the L.I.

**Relevant subject benchmark statements and other external reference points used to inform programme outcomes:**

The QAA published the revised undergraduate **Subject Benchmark Statement for Landscape Architecture** in June 2007. Masters level Benchmarking Statements have yet to be definitively produced by the QAA for Landscape Architecture.

The QAA has produced a document in September 2009 – '**Master's Degree Characteristics**' which seeks to give *'a framework that higher education providers can use in describing the nature of the Master's degrees they offer'*.

The Graduate Diploma does not fit exactly into either of these potential Benchmarks, as it is a 'Graduate' award but in a discipline that most of the graduate entrants will not have previously studied in any coherent or integrated way. Additionally, the intake to the Programme is inevitably diverse in extant skills and knowledge which means that the content of the Programme cannot be tailored to fit any 'typical' entrant.

However, within the QAA 'Master's Degree' document it identifies the characteristics of three categories of Master' degrees. The third of these is referred to as the 'Professional/practice Masters' and it is this type that is used as the basis for this Programme Specification.

Given the integrated nature of the professional education of Landscape Architects, many of the key skills and understandings identified in the June 2007 Subject Benchmarks for Landscape Architecture are relevant to students entering the Graduate Diploma and, thus, are also to be found in and are characteristics of, this Programme Specification.

This Programme Specification is, therefore, aligned with the above QAA Master's Degree document in respect of the following points contained therein:

- Programme characteristics.
- Programme purposes.

- Intended entrants.
- Relation to further study or employment.
- Characteristics of graduates.

In addition to this, the Landscape Institute (L.I.) also produces the document '**Course Accreditation – Guidance Notes for Schools**' (2005). This defines both the processes required for ongoing monitoring and renewal of accreditation and also the Course characteristics and content which the L.I. requires for professional programmes in Landscape Architecture. This Programme Specification is fully consistent with all of these L.I. requirements.

The European professional body for Landscape Architecture (EFLA) has also produced similar guidance and, via the Le Notre project of the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools (ECLAS), is involved in the ongoing 'Bologna Process'. This Programme Specification is consistent with current developments within this process, in particular the pan-European consensus that such 'Conversion' or 'Graduate-entry' Courses require a minimum of 2 years of study.

### **Programme philosophy and aims**

The Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture is situated explicitly in relation to the objectives of educating students to meet the current and future design challenges of the profession and the development of student's critical study of the discipline of Landscape Architecture. It is thus a fully integrated part of the MA in Landscape Architecture and is designed to provide a sound basis for 'Conversion' route students to proceed to the higher awards in the discipline that are offered within the School of Architecture.

Taken together with the Postgraduate Diploma, the Programme fulfils the appropriate professional and technical competences required by the L.I. for membership whilst its focus on the critical practice of design ensures its consistency with and appropriateness for, the higher awards and allows it to draw on the lengthy practice and research base in design teaching found in the Programme Team (both in-house and visitors).

Design practice entails the continual development of ability to make informed judgements and decisions based on a cycle of learning to frame fruitful questions that generate research, analysis and speculative design propositions.

Through testing, these in turn produce more precise questions and knowledge leading to deeper levels of understanding and so the cycle repeats itself until resolution is reached.

Inevitably this process is as much informed by learning to judge and decide when a proposition is inappropriate or insufficient to its agenda of questions. Thus the Programme aims to provide a supportive learning environment for this risk-taking that enables students to develop their creative and critical judgement of their own explorations of the process and ensures that assessment reflects this. Such a learning environment is particularly appropriate for 'Conversion' students.

As well as this focus on design as the critical practice that informs all aspects of the Programme, it is essential that students entering the discipline on the 'Conversion' Route are introduced to and gain facility in other essential skills and understandings that

constitute the activity of landscape architecture.

The Modules of the Programme, therefore, are designed to provide a 'foundation' in these aspects – technical, intellectual, cultural and to ensure that students, on successful completion of the Programme, are appropriately equipped to enter subsequent years of study.

To this end, as well as design projects and processes, Modules cover landscape history and theory, the natural environment and processes, the use of plant and other biotic material in design and building construction.

Much of the above is communicated via visual and graphic means. The diversity of the 'Conversion' intake means that skills in this area are frequently variable on entry and can be a source of concern to some. In order to both instil confidence and to provide a sound basis for future development of student skills as they proceed through the Programme, there are a number of elements that are included in the Conversion Year, some of which are optional in recognition of the diversity noted above.

Prior to commencing the Programme, there is an optional 'Visual Skills Week' offered which focuses on drawing and graphic skills for students who have limited existing experience of this. Further skills in this area are addressed by the provision of a 'Graphics Workbook'. This is subsequently supported within the Course by taught sessions in appropriate 'digital graphics' skills appropriate to the profession.

### **Aims of the programme**

The overarching aim of the Graduate Diploma (Conversion Year) is:

- To ensure that the student, who already possesses an initial qualification at honours level, has, via the successful completion of a further programme of study (at the same level), gained a foundation level of skills and knowledge in the discipline of Landscape Architecture appropriate for proceeding to the subsequent linked awards of Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma/MA.

The award aims to enable students to:

- Acquire a systematic understanding of the key aspects of landscape architecture, including the acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge and appropriate skills.
- Develop an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis and investigation within the field of landscape design and to further student understanding of the discipline.
- To devise appropriate design proposals for a range of problems, using ideas and techniques employed within the field of landscape practice.
- To describe and comment upon contemporary developments in the field of landscape architecture.
- Effectively communicate information, ideas, problems, designs and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- Acquire appropriate qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment:

And more specifically:

- To provide a challenging and stimulating educational framework to equip graduates of a range of disciplines and/or those professionally qualified from related disciplines for a professional career in landscape architecture.
- To offer them the means to acquire a sound level of expertise in the theory and practice of landscape design, landscape history and technical knowledge appropriate for entry to the Postgraduate Diploma/MA in Landscape Architecture.
- To develop an increasingly discriminatory knowledge of the traditions and medium of the discipline and the skills and abilities to apply and further these in their landscape design work.
- To acquire and develop the skills to visualise and communicate graphically their design ideas and proposals.
- To develop a critical and creative approach to the scope and diversity of landscape architectural topics and activities that will equip them for further study and professional practice.
- To acquire and develop a sound understanding of design process that can form the basis of imaginative and competent responses to a range of increasingly complex landscape design tasks.
- To offer the opportunity to progress (after completion of the Postgraduate Diploma./MA in Landscape Architecture and the requisite period of professional practice) to chartered professional membership of the Landscape Institute.

**Intended learning outcomes and the means by which they are achieved and demonstrated:**

**Learning Outcomes<sup>1</sup>**

**Knowledge and understanding of:**

1. Design theories and processes and their application to design proposals in space and time, including research and reflective analysis.
2. Environmental systems, natural processes, hard and soft technologies and their application and deployment in design proposals to achieve environmentally responsible and visually appropriate solutions in complex spatial and temporal situations.
3. The histories, practices and cultural context of landscape design, the analysis and use of precedents in design practice.
4. The properties of construction and planting materials and their use in design proposals.

**Subject – specific and generic skills that provide an ability to:**

5. Analyse, reflect on and synthesise information in order to generate creative and robust design solutions.
6. The use of diverse thinking in exploring and formulating design solutions.
7. Generate 2 and 3 – dimensional form by a variety of manual and digital techniques as a tool for the exploration and presentation of design proposals.
8. Apply critical judgement to both their own and others designs and articulate reasoned evaluations leading to improved design proposals.
9. Develop and communicate design proposals in a variety of media and forms to a diverse audience.

**Learning, teaching, and assessment methods used**

- Knowledge and understanding are acquired through formal lectures, student-led seminars, project work group tutorials, individual tutorials, student presentations, desk critiques, demonstrations, workshops and study visits.
- Students are encouraged to work visually and spatially in conjunction with their conceptual ideas in their own work.
- The design studios, the theoretical and contextual Modules and the technological Modules in the Programme provide a range of projects, strategies and approaches to design, whilst investigating the cultural, social, professional context of the discipline, its technology, history and theory. This provides the informed and critical basis from which students can develop their skills and knowledge as they progress in their professional Landscape Architecture studies.
- Understanding the complexity and ambiguity of the design process encourages

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on the specification of learning outcomes is available from the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching.

students to become more aware of their own values and beliefs. Design process projects require them to construct their own conceptual framework to guide their design decisions. As part of this process, students are expected to demonstrate their line of inquiry, decisions and judgements made, to justify the appropriateness of such decisions and the implications in their design work. They are required to show the design logic, (visually, spatially, and conceptually) in an interpretative sense, to explain how and why their designs appear as they do, at any stage in the process.

- Technology (hard and soft) is not taught as 'how to do it' but as technical solutions clearly set within a conceptual and design framework.
- The presentation of student's ideas visually with verbal or diagrammatic explanations of the significance/meaning or conclusions of the work encourages analytical capabilities and provides a comprehensive approach to communication skills.
- Research for presentations and seminars encourages students to capitalise on and apply their previous knowledge and experience to the study of landscape design and to learn from each other.
- Invited tutors from related disciplines and within the profession bring different perspectives and experiences for students to consider in both lecture series and design projects.
- Design project Modules involve regular weekly crits and group tutorials which are conducted to monitor progress and inform students of performance via formative feedback (which may take verbal and graphic form), prior to final summative assessment of the complete, submitted project.
- All assessments are a key learning opportunity and are utilised positively and specifically to improve as well as assess students' performance.
- The on-going use of critiques, review tutorials and post-design analysis requires students to be constantly reflective and self-critical and gives them increasing confidence to appraise and judge their own work.
- A variety of forms of assessment are employed in the Programme. This is primarily by the submission of project-based work which calls for the deployment of a synthesis of skills and is continuously underpinned by the ongoing feedback noted above. These project submissions may be supplemented by individual verbal presentations to the Year group. Other forms of assessment include illustrated essays and reports, 'seen' examinations, project notebooks, and technical materials files.
- Visual communication is an essential part of teaching and learning in design. Typically, students may have varying levels of skill in this area when joining the Programme. Specific opportunities are present within the Programme by which students may acquire appropriate levels of such skills. The emphasis in this is on students using the graphic conventions of the profession as a starting point, rather than an end point in their work.
- Familiarity with the translation of three-dimensional designs into two-dimensional drawings, the procedures and expectations of professional communication and practice of implementation are, in addition, developed through design studios, construction notebooks, lecture series and the production of working drawings.

**AWARD – MA 180 Credits**

**LAN 7338** MA Dissertation

60 Credits

**AWARD - PG DIPLOMA 120 Credits**

**LAN 7334**  
Research  
Meth. /  
Des. Thesis  
15 Credits

**LAN 7335**  
Thesis  
Design 1  
15 Credits

**LAN 7336**  
Thesis  
Design 2  
15 Credits

**LAN 7337**  
Thesis  
DesignTech  
15 Credits

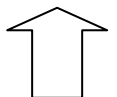
**AWARD – PG CERTIFICATE 60 Credits**

**LAN 7330**  
Prof.  
Practice  
15 Credits

**LAN 7331**  
Critical  
(R)urbanism  
15 Credits

**LAN 7332**  
Critical  
Design  
15 Credits

**LAN 7333**  
Internat.  
Studio  
15 Credits



**POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA + MA (Cognate Route)**

'CONVERSION' YEAR COMPLETE – AWARD GRADUATE DIPLOMA

**LAN6032**  
Studio  
30 Credits

**LAN6033**  
Design  
Process  
30 Credits

**LAN6030**  
History +  
Theory  
30 Credits

**LAN6031**  
Landscape  
Technology  
30 Credits



**MA LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE (Conversion Route)**



## **Support for Learning including Personal Development Planning (PDP)**

Students are encouraged to identify and, with guidance, to reflect on their own learning needs and are offered the following support as appropriate to meet those needs:

Training to become a landscape architect is a long process and without establishing targets along the way it can be a daunting prospect. PDP is a structured and supported process undertaken over a number of years to enabling critical reflection upon learning, performance and achievement and facilitating planning for personal, educational and professional development. It complements structured and self directed activities as part of the course, building upon the learning objectives of module briefs to give an overview of studies.

### **PDP within the Programme**

It should be noted that all students of the Graduate Diploma have previously undertaken significant higher education study and many (probably a majority) will have worked in a variety of professional contexts prior to joining the Course. Furthermore, the professionally-accredited nature of the Programme means that the application of learning to the workplace is a fundamental aspect of the entire Programme.

One of the defining characteristics of the cohorts on the Programme is the diversity deriving from the above. The PDP process is seen as being a means where the various issues consequent upon this diversity, i.e. mature, self-reflective students who are nevertheless starting a very new area of study, can be addressed both as part of formal learning activities and in a more informal manner.

There is thus a somewhat different emphasis for PDP in the Programme than, for example in undergraduate Programmes.

The Programme Team have identified the following PDP Aims as being appropriate for the diverse range of students on the Programme.

### **Aims**

- To bring a clearer focus to learning for students new to the discipline.
- Use personal motivation to achieve career goals.
- Develop skills in self-management.
- Greater personal independence and self-confidence as a learner in a new discipline.
- More awareness of how to apply learning to new problems and contexts;
- Greater awareness of the professional and policy context in which landscape design skills are deployed.
- Reflective, strategic, analytical and creative thinking skills that strengthen academic performance.

In addition, the stated aim of the Programme to develop the 'Critical Practitioner', has given rise to the need to consider the following issues within the PDP process

- Lifetime goals.
- Work location.

- Personal values.
- Work/life balance.
- What is success?
- Personal sacrifice.

#### **What will the PDP Process entail?**

- The Learning Diary: Personal records of learning and achievement.
- CV and personal statement towards career planning.
- University transcript of academic performance.

Students take ownership of this file. It forms the basis of discussions with the course team/tutor during the annual PDP session.

Action points and key issues will be used to prompt further research, training and development opportunities by students.

The PDP process will be monitored on a termly basis.

#### **Criteria for admission**

Candidates must satisfy the general admission requirements of the programme.

The current admission requirements can be found under the 'Entry Requirements' tab of the web page for this course.

#### **Methods for evaluation and enhancement of quality and standards including listening and responding to views of students**

##### **Student Issues**

- The main objective is to ensure fitness for purpose and considerable emphasis is placed on student feedback by the Programme Team when responding to issues.
- Individual student feedback is received anonymously via standardised Feedback forms for all Modules. Further student feedback is received from Students' Year Representatives at termly Programme Boards of Studies.
- Both of these forms of feedback and the Programme's responses to them by way of the annual Action Plan are detailed in the Annual Course Report (ACR).

##### **External Scrutiny**

- Both 'Academic' and 'Practitioner' External Examiners are appointed. They interview ALL final year graduating students (Major Design Project Modules), receive copies of ALL MA Dissertations and see representative samples of work submitted for Modules in the Graduate Diploma Programme.

- Professional standards are maintained by annual visits from the L.I. Accreditation Review Group (ARG). The ARG review work in a similar way to the External Examiners and meet separately with a representative group of students (incl. those from the Graduate Diploma) and with the Programme Team and Head of School.

They also make interim visits to the Programme during the year to observe teaching and review sessions. As a result of this engagement with the Programme, they produce an Annual Report to the L.I. which the Programme Director is required to formulate a response to for the professional body's Programme Accreditation Sub-Committee. This is a condition of continued professional accreditation.

- Reports from both Externals are also responded to formally and matters raised are discussed in the ACR's Action Plan.
- Students of the Programme also undertake the National Student Satisfaction Survey.